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DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF THE ARTS,

BY THE

HONOURABLE DE WITT CLINTON, LL. D.

(PRESIDENT.)

23d OCTOBER, 1816.

NEW-YORK:

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY T. & W. MERCEIN,

Printers to the Academy.

1816.

NEW-YORK INSTITUTION.

23d OCTOBER, 1816.

AT A MEETING OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF THE ARTS :

RESOLVED, *That the thanks of the Academy be presented to the Honourable De Witt Clinton, LL D. for his Discourse, delivered this day, and that he be requested to furnish a copy for publication.*

JOHN R. MURRAY, *Esq. Vice-President,*

DOCTOR DAVID HOSACK, *and*

COLONEL JOHN TRUMBULL,

Were appointed a Committee to impart this Resolution.

Extract from the Minutes,

JOHN PINTARD,

Secretary.

DISTRICT OF NEW-YORK, ss.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the twenty-fourth day of October, in the fortieth year of the Independence of the United States of America, T. & W. MERCEIN, of the said district, have deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof they claim as proprietors, in the words following, to wit:

“ A Discourse, delivered before the American Academy of the Arts, by the Honourable De Witt Clinton, LL. D. President, 23d October, 1816.”

IN CONFORMITY to the act of Congress of the United States, entitled “ An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;” and also to an act, entitled “ An act supplementary to an act, entitled an act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints.”

THERON RUDD,

Clerk of the District of New-York

DISCOURSE, &c.

*Gentlemen of the American
Academy of the Arts,*

I HAVE complied with your request to open the Academy on this interesting occasion, with great pleasure, but not without unaffected diffidence. You must be sensible, that this Institution has struggled against a succession of serious difficulties from its origin to the present time ; that at different periods, it has indeed cheered us with a glimmering light, but that at most times, it has appeared like an expiring taper. The causes are various ; the absence of vigorous and systematic exertion—the want of funds—of suitable apartments—of public exhibitions—and of a complete co-operation with our artists—and a consequent indisposition in the public to countenance it under all these embarrassments : and when it was found almost impracticable to obtain even a meeting of the Directors, I did not consider it necessary to attend to their request, to pronounce an eulogium on our late President, until a more favourable condition should enable us to execute it in a manner the most respectful to the deceased, and the most creditable to the Academy. That auspicious period has now arrived. The libe-

rality of our municipality has furnished us with spacious apartments, and the public spirit and taste of a few of our associates, have prepared them for our reception. The collections of the Academy have been drawn from their obscure receptacles, to adorn that edifice, and the rich and various contributions of genius will, it is to be hoped, give elevation to this city, and reflect honour on our country.

It is a subject of deep regret, that the correcting interposition of reason is necessary to remove the strong prejudices which exist against this Institution; for, it is believed by many, that the state of society, and the form of our government, are unfriendly to the encouragement of the Fine Arts, and that they ought to be neglected or over-looked, until more important establishments are endowed by private and public liberality, and until the higher departments of human knowledge are improved to the utmost extent.

If this subject were presented for consideration, as a controversy of preference between the Fine Arts and the Sciences; or between the polite and the mechanic arts, there would be no room for hesitation. The useful must always take precedence of the agreeable—the accommodations must always be preferred to the luxuries of life; the investigations of science, and the acquisitions of learning must ever take the highest rank in intellectual estimation; but in this case there is fortunately no collision.

The physical, the moral, the intellectual, and the political appearances of the world, exhibit an extraordinary state of things. We have seen within a few years, society torn from its foundations, and governments sanctioned by time, and fortified by prejudice, prostrated and hurled into ruin; we have seen the world in arms, and on a sudden the olive branch of peace extended to mankind; we are witnessing the silent and rapid progress of a great moral revolution, by the extension of the blessings of education and the lights of religion; we have beheld some of the most destructive diseases disarmed of their fury; we have seen endless sideral worlds, which were hitherto impervious to human vision, fully opened to our contemplation; we have applied the most powerful agents to the purposes of analysis and decomposition, and have obtained new views of elementary and compound substances. The sciences which relate to inorganic matter, and to organized bodies, have been cultivated with wonderful ardour; the depths of mathematical and physical knowledge have been sounded, and the most intricate recesses of the human mind have been explored: and yet in the midst of all this intellectual activity—of this scientific elevation, of these moral improvements and political mutations, ample room has been found for the cultivation and encouragement of the Fine Arts. Genius has been cherished; taste has exercised its high endowments; the world has been explored for specimens of art; and the costly and

magnificent contributions of the present age, have triumphed over all the enterprises of former times.

It is impossible to restrain the operations of the human mind, within the severe boundaries of science. The direction which nature gives, must be pursued: And, as in the economy of society, it is essential, that a division of labour should exist in the mechanic arts, so it is requisite, in the arrangement of the intellectual world, that different minds should be impelled to different pursuits, in order that every science, and every art, depending for its success upon mental exertion, should attain the greatest perfection. Hence it is, that some will devote themselves to works of imagination, and others to the exercise of the reasoning power; some to the polite arts, and others to the abstract sciences. In the progress of a civilized and enlightened community, all the professions, whether liberal or mechanical, whether depending upon the labour of the mind, or the hands, the exercise of the fancy, or the judgment, must be filled up: and it is the duty of a patriotic government, to encourage all, by dispensing its beneficence, like the dew of heaven; preferring, however, whenever preference becomes necessary, such as are most conducive to general and permanent prosperity.

And, indeed, when we consider the origin, the history, and the uses of the fine arts, we must be persuaded, that they ought to receive the encouraging smiles of public beneficence: They occupy an extensive field; they administer to the enjoy-

ments and accommodations of mankind; they demand great mental labour, and produce high mental pleasure, and they mark with an unerring hand, the boundary between barbarism and refinement.

Sculpture, painting, engraving, architecture, gardening, music, and poetry, compose the fine arts. At the earliest dawn of civilization, they attracted the attention of the human race. The sacred scriptures inform us of the high estimation in which they were held. The institutions of Moses, and the edifices of Solomon, demonstrate great proficiency, and the garden of Alcinous, and the shield of Achilles, as described by Homer, show, that the arts must have flourished before the composition of his immortal work. The history of Attica proclaims the high regard in which they were held, by the Ancient Grecians, and, at the same time, exhibits the most elevated, and most degrading views of human nature. The whole territory covered, but about, 150,000 acres of land, and its greatest population did not exceed 300,000 souls: Athens has been described as the metropolis of learning, the school of arts, and the centre of taste and genius.* Under all circumstances, and in all conditions, whether blessed with a free government, or oppressed by tyranny—whether over-run by the Persian, the Macedonian, the Roman, the Goth, or the Turk—whether enlightened by the effulgence of science, or bewildered in the night of ignorance, this little

* Chandler's Travels.

spot has attracted the attention, and has commanded the admiration of mankind, for more than three thousand years. The Acropolis is, perhaps, the most interesting place on the globe. In the school of Phidias, and under the administration of Pericles, it was replenished with pictures, statues, pieces of sculpture, and the most finished models of architecture. In the time of Pliny, 3000 statues remained; after sustaining the depredations of Roman conquerors, the ravages of barbarian invaders, and the delapidations of Turkish tyrants, it still contained the most precious monuments of art, and the most noble objects of curiosity: it has always engrossed the attention of enlightened travellers; drawings, prints, and descriptions of its riches, have been given from time to time, to an admiring world, and the most invaluable specimens of sublime skill, have been transported to adorn the collections of taste and munificence. We thus see the immortal honour, which a small republic has acquired, by the cultivation of the arts; and we also perceive, the degrading effects of a bad government upon its ill-fated inhabitants: they still retain the form, the beauty, and the native wit of their ancestors, but they are covered with the gloom of ignorance, and a late traveller says, that "the state of the arts in Greece, is, as might be expected, most deplorable. It would be difficult to find an architect, a sculptor or painter, equal to the common workmen in the towns of Christendom."*

* Hobhouse.

The ancient Grecians, highly favoured by the Almighty, with a benignant clime, and a fertile soil; blessed with the choicest gifts of intellect, and the freest institutions of government, were, at the same time, possessed of a generous thirst for praise, and a noble spirit of emulation, that carried to perfection all the works of art, and all the productions of genius. When the father of profane history read his immortal work to the men of Greece, assembled at the Olympian games, what more sublime spectacle could be exhibited of human nature? The greatest genius, submitting the greatest effort of the human mind, to the judgment of the most enlightened people. And, when even the herb women of Athens, could criticise the phraseology of Demosthenes, and the meanest artisan could pronounce judgment on the works of Apelles and Phidias, what might not be expected from the well directed efforts of that wonderful nation?

An enthusiasm, unequalled in its intensity, and unparalleled in its effects, pervaded Greece in favour of the Arts and Sciences, and sometimes it even arrested the hand of desolation, and averted the horrors of war. A beautiful story is told in the Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius, illustrative of the dominion of this noble spirit, which puts at a distance the most chivalric exhibitions of modern times. Demetrius, the celebrated commander, attacked the island of Rhodes, and laid siege to the principal and richest town in it. That general had obtained

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the surname of Poliorcetes, for the skill which he manifested, and the machines he employed in the conduct of his sieges. In the course of his attack, he was preparing to destroy and consume by fire some public buildings without the walls of the town, which were protected only by a slight guard. These buildings contained the famous picture of Ialyssus, from the hand of that illustrious painter, Protogenes. Enraged against the Rhodians, he envied them the beauty and the excellence of this work, but they sent ambassadors to him with this message, "What is the reason that, setting fire to the buildings, you would destroy this picture. If you conquer us, you will possess the whole town, and, by right of victory, the picture, unhurt, will be yours; but if you are unable to subdue us, we desire you to consider whether it is not dishonourable, because you cannot conquer the Rhodians, to make war upon the deceased Protogenes." Having heard this message from the ambassadors, relinquishing the siege, he spared at once the picture and the city. Plutarch has indeed represented this transaction in a different light, but highly creditable to Demetrius and the art. It is also related of this celebrated picture, that Protogenes was seven years in finishing it—that he gave it four coats of colours, in order that when one was effaced by time, another might supply its place—that when he had long laboured in vain to paint the foam of a dog, he happily hit it off by throwing the brush in anger at the dog's mouth—

and that when Apelles first saw this production, he was so much astonished that he could not speak. It was conveyed to Rome by Cassius, and placed in the temple of Peace, where it remained until the time of Commodus, when, together with the temple, it was consumed by fire.

In course of time, the seat of the fine arts was transferred from Athens to the eternal city; and the monsters who occupied the throne of Augustus, endeavoured, by encouraging them, to varnish over their own crimes, and to propitiate the affections of mankind. After a long night of darkness, the restoration of letters was accompanied by the resurrection of the fine arts: and the Italian, the Flemish, the Dutch, and the French schools, bear testimony to the high estimation in which they were held. Great Britain and the north of Europe have also cherished this benign propensity; and amidst the extraordinary calamities and overwhelming desolations of modern times, it has been the pride and the glory of the great characters who have participated in these mighty events, to secure blessings to their country and immortality to themselves, by collecting the costly and superb monuments of the arts, and by creating and diffusing the light of science.

If, however, in the history of the world, it should sometimes appear, that usurpers and tyrants have been the patrons of magnificent works, let not the praise be transferred from the individual to the government. The career of successful ambition has placed in his hands the power of dispensing good,

and he endeavours to conciliate affection, by accommodating his acts to the taste and science of the community. But if unfortunately ignorance prevail, and a hatred of knowledge bear sway, then the despot will involve the country in the thickest gloom of Cimmerian darkness. The prolific power—the fertile soil that produces all good, must reside in the great body of the people. And when a free nation passes under the yoke of tyranny, some of the original stamina of greatness—some of the celestial fire of liberty, will still survive the prostration, and may enable the usurper to spread the blessings of knowledge and refinement; but if there were at no time a pre-existent state of freedom, it will be difficult to trace in the experience of the world any successful cultivation of knowledge until the lapse of ages, or the benefits of extended intercourse, shall have introduced some radiations of light from countries which are, or once have been free. Even modern Italy, degraded as she is, by the loss of liberty, still feels the divine impulse which was communicated in the days of her freedom: and although the sword of her heroes has been transformed into the stiletto of the assassin, and the sublime genius of her poets, her orators, her historians, and her artists, has evaporated in the refinements of Machiavelian policy, and in the subtleties of polemic controversy, yet she has within our days produced illustrious men, who have enlarged the boundaries of knowledge, and extended the empire of virtue.

A republican government, instead of being unfriendly to the growth of the fine arts, is the appropriate soil for their cultivation. The ability to promote useful undertakings and beneficial institutions, must exist to a certain extent in every community, and it certainly may be called into exertion with greater potency in a free state than under an arbitrary government, where the money expended for their encouragement is extorted from the people. The privileged orders which prevail in civilized monarchies are hostile to the high prerogatives of intellect. They create a barrier against the ascent of genius to the highest stations, and they cast the most distinguished talents and the most exalted endowments in the back ground of society. And although they sometimes produce herbs of salubrious virtue, and trees of noble growth, yet they in general originate and support those pestilent plants whose seeds, elevated by the winds, are scattered in every direction, and are propagated by the exhaustion of the most fertile soils, and the destruction of the most valuable productions.

The condition of our community, in relation to manners or education, cannot be urged as an objection against the cultivation of the fine arts. A nation highly agricultural, and the second commercial people in the world—improved by science and abounding in institutions of education, must surely be contemplated as friendly to those arts which polish and refine society.

Although the ancients were superior in sculpture, yet the moderns have, in all probability, excelled them in the graphic art. It is believed that the former had but four pigments in colouring—that they were deficient in *chiaro oscuro* and keeping—that they were ignorant of the art of painting in oil—and it is well known that the art of engraving is a modern invention, and is a great patron of the painter, by multiplying and extending his productions. The ancient artists had undoubtedly superior advantages. They were called upon to supply statues of the gods and to adorn the temples of religion. The statue of Jupiter by Phidias, and of Juno by Polycletes, were renowned through all antiquity. The archetypes from which they delineated the human form, were the most beautiful of the human race. The Greek artists were men of the first consideration and of the most finished education. Socrates himself was a statuary.

The imitative arts must act upon the models furnished by nature or by man. The images which constitute the materials, on which the inventive or plastic power proceeds, must be drawn from one or both of these sources. The pictorial art embraces an extensive field: It includes historical painters—painters of portraits—of landscapes—of sea pieces, and of natural history. And in the higher orders of the art, there are two distinct styles; the grand or sublime, and the ornamental or beautiful.

With respect to the comparative advantages or disadvantages of the ancient and modern artists, we stand precisely on the same footing as our brethren of the old world; but we are unfortunately deficient in having but few distinguished models of art.

The professors of the fine arts occupy the same ground with us as other callings. There are some who adorn society by their talents, and are distinguished for their education and virtues. In these respects we are not inferior to those of other times and other countries. And it certainly cannot be alleged that there is an inaptitude in the American genius for the fine arts. On the contrary, from the anecdotes which are related of some of our distinguished painters, it would appear that an irresistible impulse had devoted them to the art. And it is well known that, both abroad and at home, our countrymen (whose names delicacy forbids me to mention in this place) have exhibited powers of genius and of taste, which have commanded not only applause, but admiration.

It has been well observed,

—Mutum est pictura poema.*

The inventive power in both cases acts upon those images which have been collected by observation and deposited in the store house of the memory—and which refer, not only to the world of sense without us, but to the world of thought within us. But as almost all our ideas are derived in the first

* Horace.

instance from sensation—and as the imitative arts rely, for their field of operation, upon the material world, it must be obvious that the imagination of the artist must derive its power and receive its complexion from the country in which he was born, and in which he resides. And can there be a country in the world better calculated than ours to exercise and to exalt the imagination—to call into activity the creative powers of the mind, and to afford just views of the beautiful, the wonderful and the sublime? Here Nature has conducted her operations on a magnificent scale—extensive and elevated mountains—lakes of oceanic size—rivers of prodigious magnitude—cataracts unequalled for volume of water—and boundless forests filled with wild beasts and savage men, and covered with the towering oak and the heaven aspiring pine.

This wild, romantic and awful scenery, is calculated to produce a correspondent impression on the imagination—to elevate all the faculties of the mind, and to exalt all the feelings of the heart: But when cultivation has exerted its power—when the forest is converted into fertile fields, blooming with beauty and smiling with plenty, then the mind of the artist derives a correspondent colour from the scenes with which it is conversant; and the sublime, the wonderful, the ornamental and the beautiful, thus become, in turn, familiar to his imagination.

America, notwithstanding its infancy, has witnessed events as worthy of the delineation of genius as

any that have occurred in the old world. Even in our colonial state, the richest themes exist for the pencil of the painter—but commencing with the Declaration of Independence, and coming down to the events of the present times, what more magnificent subjects could be selected for the graphic art? The painter of history has here an ample field for the display of his powers. The deliberations of our statesmen—the exploits of our heroes may be revived and perpetuated—deeds of mighty import, the offspring of ethereal minds, and the parents of immortal glory—and here the Portrait Painter, the Statuary, and the Engraver, may transmit to posterity the likenesses of those men who have acted and suffered in their country's cause. The portrait collection of this city, by comprising many of the principal heroes of the country, is entitled to great praise in its tendency to stimulate to noble deeds, and to encourage the Fine Arts, by displaying to advantage the compositions of our best painters, and its merits would be greatly enhanced if it were extended so as to embrace illustrious men, who have done honour to the Arts and Sciences, or who have distinguished themselves in other respects as men of extraordinary talents or virtues. The utmost care ought to be adopted in the selection, as one unworthy preference may disgrace the whole gallery, and any unmerited omission may recal to mind the observation of the historian respecting the images of illustrious men, displayed in a magnificent proces-

sion at Rome. “*Præfulgebant Cassius et Brutus, eo ipso quod effigies eorum non visebantur.*”*

Although I am not prepared to go the whole length with a distinguished countryman,† and to say that the genius of architecture, seems to have shed his maledictions over our land, yet it must be admitted, that too little attention and encouragement have been given to this important art. Many of our public buildings have a sombre and heavy appearance, and the interior arrangements shew the absence of skill and taste. Within a few years, however, great improvements may be seen in our private as well as in our public edifices. This revolution in our taste, may be traced from the time, when with a spirit truly wise and munificent, the foundations of the edifice in which we are now assembled, were laid—a building which, for magnificence of design, and elegance of execution, transcends every public edifice in America. Let it be strongly impressed on our minds, that the most beautiful and sublime works of Athens, were erected during the administration of one great man—that during their execution, so many kinds of labour, and such a variety of instruments and materials were requisite, that every art was exerted, every hand employed, and the whole city was in pay, and at the same time adorned and supported by itself; and that it was never in a more prosperous condi-

* Tacitus.

† Jefferson.

tion, than when all its resources were expended in great public works. The treasure thus applied, was in a state of incessant activity and circulation, enlivening all the avenues of industry, cheering the brow of labour, and rewarding the hand of skill. The magnificence of a free people, ought always to be seen in their halls of justice, in their edifices of learning, and in their temples of religion.

As the streams and springs which nature has produced, are, when collected into reservoirs, and regulated by skill, rendered subservient to subsistence, accommodation, and pleasure, so will the rays of genius, concentrated in this institution, create and diffuse a taste for the Fine Arts, and elevate our country in the estimation of the civilized world. Its apartments will contain the best models of ancient and modern art, and the most distinguished specimens of all that can occupy the genius, or perfect the taste of our country. To that place, the artist will resort for study and improvement—there he will deposit the fruits of his genius, there he will enter the lists of fame, and there he will attain the palm of glory. How many men are there, upon whom nature has shed her choicest gifts, who, restrained by diffidence, the companion of genius, or prevented by an elevation of sentiment, which, like the celebrated flower of the east, disdains the support of the earth,* or bewildered by that ignorance

* *Epidendrum flos æeris.*

of the world which attaches itself to the man of seclusion and contemplation, linger out an obscure existence, without notice, without patronage, without one smile of comfort, or one word of encouragement. And how many more are there, who feel the divine inspiration of genius, and who possess commanding, ductile and transcendant minds, which might enable them to ascend to the highest, or stoop to the lowest flights of art, but who, for the want of opportunities for cultivation, are either compelled to wander abroad, or to smother the nascent powers of intellect. This Academy will conquer all these difficulties, and surmount all these disadvantages. On these altars, dedicated to the Muses and the Graces, will be offered the choicest gifts of genius, and the most finished specimens of art. Here the temple will be reared—the sacrifice will be made—the fire will be kindled—and no longer shall the votary be compelled to seek under foreign shores, and in distant lands, the objects of his adoration. In this place shall be deposited the portraits, the busts, and the statues of those illustrious men, who have extended the fame of their country, brightened the path of glory, illuminated the regions of knowledge, and exemplified the blessings of religion. Here shall the future great men of America, the guides, the lights, and the shields of unborn generations, repair to view the monuments of art—to behold the departed worthies of former times—to rouse the

soul of generous emulation, and to catch the spirit of heroic virtue.

Here shall the virtues—here shall wisdom's train,
 Their long-lost friends rejoicing, as of old,
 Embrace the smiling family of arts,
 The muses and the graces.*

And if our artists shall ever expect on eagle wings to penetrate into lofty and untried regions, and to ascend into the highest heaven of invention, let them cultivate that noble enthusiasm, that sublime sensibility, without which exertion is useless; which animated Corregio when he said, *And I also am a painter*, and which fired the bosom of Zeuxis, when he exclaimed, that he designed for eternity. Let them also respect the decencies of life, the charms of virtue, and the injunctions of morality. The most inimitable powers of invention and execution, cannot atone for that perversion of decorum which addresses the sensuality of the imagination, and which loosens the restraints of the moral sense. A great artist ought to be emphatically a good man; illustrating, in his works, the beauties of art, and, in his life, the beauties of virtue.

There are certain mighty pillars which support the complicated fabric of society, and there are distinguished ornaments which beautify and embellish it. Upon agriculture, manufactures, and commerce, upon science, literature, morality, and religion, all

* Akenside.

associations of the human race must rely for subsistence or support—but the Fine Arts superadd the graces of a Chesterfield to the gigantic mind of a Locke—they are the acanthi which adorn the Corinthian column—the halos which surround the sun of knowledge; they excite labour, produce riches, enlarge the sphere of innocent amusements, increase the stock of harmless pleasure, expand our intellectual powers, improve our moral faculties, stimulate to illustrious deeds, enhance the charms of virtue, diffuse the glories of heroism, augment the public wealth, and extend the national reputation.

There are but two institutions of this kind in America; one in Mexico of an earlier, and one in Philadelphia of a more recent origin. Seeing that they are calculated to produce so much good, and to reflect so much honour; that ours is the first establishment in the United States; that it has after discouraging obstacles and severe struggles, attained a permanent and prosperous condition, it is no more than right and proper that its eminent benefactors and friends, who have preceded us to the grave, should receive the humble tribute of our applause. Among the most distinguished of these are, Robert R. Livingston, once President, and Robert Fulton, formerly a Director of this Academy.

In the dispensations of the Almighty, it frequently happens, that constellations of great men appear at the same period in the world. Great talents are

elicited by great occasions, and produced by great exigencies. This was eminently the case at the commencement of the American revolution. An infant people were called upon to measure swords with a giant nation, and Providence prepared us for the contest, by giving us men eminent in the cabinet and heroic in the field, to enlighten our councils, and to direct our energies. Among those illustrious men, was Mr. Livingston. He was descended from a distinguished family, was favoured with an excellent education, and was endowed with great and original talents, possessing in an eminent degree, *mens divini*, the divinity of genius. His mind was improved by contemplation, by conversation, and by reading. His eloquence was the fruit of a fertile imagination, the offspring of a prolific mind, enriched by a splendid diction, and embellished by a graceful delivery. Those that have heard him speak, will recognize the character of his oratory in Denham's admired description of the Thames.

Tho' deep, yet clear ; tho' gentle, yet not dull,
Strong without rage ; without o'er flowing full.

He was also, an able writer, and had devoted himself, to the study of the law, and to the acquisition of political knowledge.

With these endowments, and with these talents, and with a zeal corresponding with the crisis, he was chosen a member of the first congress ; he was one of the committee that prepared the declaration of independence, and he continued a distinguished ac-

tor, in the great scenes of the revolution; he was minister of foreign affairs, a member of the convention, that formed the state constitution; chancellor of the state, and delegate to congress on extraordinary occasions. To him we are indebted for the Council of Revision, in our state constitution, which by combining the judiciary, with the executive, in the exercise of a qualified negative, creates a joint defence, against the absorbing powers of the legislative department, and therefore, more fully accords with the views of eminent political writers, than an arrangement which commits this power to the executive authority alone.

After the conclusion of the revolutionary war, he continued to fill the high office of chancellor. He was a member of the convention that adopted the federal constitution, and he finally closed his political life, after serving several years as minister plenipotentiary in France.

Let us now contemplate Mr. Livingston, in a more interesting attitude; as the friend of science, the patron of the arts, and the inventor, and introducer of useful improvements. In the scale of excellence adopted by the ancients, founders of states, lawgivers, and heroes, were graduated below the authors, and inventors of beneficial arts and institutions. The former, such as Hercules, Theseus, Minos, and Romulus, were considered Demi-gods; while the latter, such as Ceres, Apollo, Mercury, and Bacchus, were enrolled among the gods. And,

according to the opinion of the greatest of philosophers, and justly: "for the merit of the former, is confined within the circle of an age, or a nation, is like fruitful flowers, which, though they be profitable, and good, yet serve but for that season, and for a latitude of ground where they fall; but the other is, indeed, like the benefits of heaven, which are permanent and universal. The former, again, is mixed with strife and perturbation, but the latter hath the true character of divine presence, coming in *aura leni*, without noise or agitation."*

At an early period, Mr. L. had turned his attention to the improvement of our agriculture and manufactures. A society was instituted in 1793, for the Promotion of Useful Arts, of which he was elected the first president, and which office he held during his life. The volumes published by this society, under the patronage of the state, contain many valuable papers written by him.

The best soil, after a long process of cultivation, loses its prolific power. Some of our lands are of so slight a texture, that the vegetating principle is soon exhausted, and large tracts of country, without extraneous aid, are incapable of cultivation. The application of manure was always laborious, generally expensive, and sometimes impracticable, until Mr. L. introduced the use of gypsum into this state. His essays on this subject contains many valuable

* Bacon.

remarks, and show a spirit of experimental observation, highly creditable to his discernment. The western parts of this state contain this fossil of various kinds, of excellent qualities, and to an unbounded extent. Its benign effects are well known, although the mode of its operation is still a subject of doubt. Like the hand of Midas, it has converted our soil into gold.

His attention was also directed to the introduction of useful plants, and wild animals from abroad, to the domestication of some of our animals, to the improvement of our fruits and grasses, to the diseases of cattle, and to the growth and nourishment of plants in general. The volumes of the society furnish his observations at length on these subjects.

But his efforts were more especially directed to the introduction of merino, and the amelioration of common sheep. He wrote an invaluable essay on this subject, which was printed by the direction of the legislature, and which was republished in Europe with great applause. I am sensible that a contrariety of opinion exists in this country, as well as in England, respecting the advantages of the merino sheep. It was easy to foresee, that the exorbitant price would, in course of time, meet with a corresponding depression; that the animal would fall into unskilful hands, and that the disappointments of cupidity would excite a vehement clamour against it. The well regulated judgment of the public, will, however, pronounce a favourable decision. An ani-

mal, yielding such fine wool, so essential to the manufacturer of fine cloths, and which will always command a high price, as long as a duty is laid on the exportation of it in Spain, must be considered a great acquisition.

He had, for a series of years, long before his acquaintance with Mr. Fulton, contemplated the power generated by steam, and considered the utility of its application to the propulsion of vessels and carriages. His acquaintance with that great mechanical genius, introduced a new era into navigation.

During his foreign embassy, he devoted himself to the improvement of our agriculture. His letters on that occasion, reflect equal credit on his intelligence and patriotism. He also endeavoured to improve our national taste. To his exertions and influence we are indebted for a valuable portion of our collection.

We have thus seen Mr. L. converting the lessons of his experience and observation into sources of practical and general utility. He was not one of those remote suns, whose light and heat have not yet reached our planetary system. His object, his ambition, his study, was to do the greatest good to the greatest number. There is no doubt, but that he felt the extent of his own powers, and the plenitude of his own resources; but he bore his faculties meekly about him, never offending the pride or the delicacy of his associates by arrogance, or by intrusion, by neglect, or by slight, by acting the

oracle, or dictator. He was an eminent arbiter elegantiarum, or judge of propriety; his conversation was unpremeditated; it abounded with brilliant wit, with apposite illustrations, and with various and extended knowledge, always as gentle as "zephyrs blowing below the violet,"* and always exhibiting the overflowings of a fertile mind. His great qualities were attended with a due sense of his own imperfections, and of his limited powers. He did not see in himself the tortoise of the Indian, or the atlas of the heathen mythology, sustaining the universe. Nor did he keep himself at an awful distance, wrapped up in gloomy abstraction, or veiled in mysterious, or supercilious dignity. He knew that the fraternity of mankind is a vast assemblage of good and evil, of light and darkness, and that the whole chain of human being is connected by the charities of life, by the ties of mutual dependence, and reciprocal benevolence. Such was Robert R. Livingston. He was not one of those factitious characters, who rise up and disappear, like the mountains of sand, which the wind raises in the deserts, nor did he pretend to possess a mind illuminating all the departments of knowledge, like that great elementary substance, which communicates the principle of vitality to all animated nature: but he will be ranked, by the judgment of impartial posterity, among the great men of the revolution, and in the faithful pages of history, he will be classed with George Clinton, John Jay,

* Shakspeare.

Pierre Van Cortlandt, Philip Schuyler, William Floyd, Philip Livingston, Gouverneur Morris, James Duane, John Morin Scott, and the other venerable and conscript fathers of the state.

Fortunately for the interests of mankind, Mr. L. became acquainted with Robert Fulton, a self-created great man, who has risen into distinguished usefulness, and into exalted eminence, by the energies of his own genius, unsupported by extrinsic advantages.

Mr. F. had directed the whole force of his mind to mathematical learning and to mechanical philosophy. Plans of defence against maritime invasion and of sub-aquatic navigation had occupied his reflections. During the late war he was the Archimedes of his country.

The poet was considered under the influence of a disordered imagination when he exclaimed,

“ Soon shall thy arm, unconquer'd steam! afar

“ Drag the slow barge or drive the rapid car,

“ Or on wide-waving wings expanded bear

“ The flying chariot through the fields of air.”*

The connexion between Livingston and Fulton realized, to a great degree, the vision of the poet. All former experiments had failed, and the genius of Fulton, aided and fostered by the public spirit, and discernment of Livingston, created one of the greatest accommodations for the benefit of mankind: These

* Darwin.

illustrious men will be considered, through all time, as the benefactors of the world—they will be emphatically hailed as the Castor and Pollux of antiquity—*lucida sidera*—stars, of excellent light and of most benign influence.

Mr. Fulton was personally well known to most who hear me. To those who were favoured with the high communion of his superior mind, I need not expatiate on the wonderful vivacity, activity, comprehension and clearness of his intellectual faculties: and while he was meditating plans of mighty import for his future fame and his country's good, he was cut down in the prime of his life and in the midst of his usefulness. Like the self-burning tree of Gambia, he was destroyed by the fire of his own genius and the never ceasing activity of a vigorous mind. And O! may we not humbly hope that his immortal spirit, disembodied from its material incumbrance, has taken its flight to the world of pure intellect, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest."

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